

PRESS RELEASE

House Armed Services Committee Duncan Hunter, Chairman

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 5, 2003

CONTACT

Harald Stavenas

Meghan Wedd

(202) 225-2539

OPENING REMARKS OF CHAIRMAN DUNCAN HUNTER

Secretary of Defense FY04 Defense Posture Hearing

Today, the committee meets to receive testimony on the Administration's defense budget request for fiscal year 2004.

It is a pleasure to welcome back Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, General Myers and Dr. Zakheim.

We have a lot of ground to cover today and with our slightly enlarged complement of 61 members, I want to make sure we reserve as much time as possible for individual members to engage the witnesses.

Mr. Secretary, this is the third time you have appeared before the committee to present a Bush Administration budget proposal. But I believe it is fair to say that this may be the first budget that fully reflects the priorities of the Administration across the board. We will spend the better part of the next several months reviewing and debating these priorities and through this process look forward to arriving at a common view on the best approach to provide the strongest possible defense program for the nation.

This said, Mr. Secretary, the defense program being put forward presents many of us who have long worked in the trenches for a strong defense with a series of dilemmas.

First, you deserve tremendous credit for sharply reversing the decade-long decline in defense spending that characterized the previous administration. However, the defense budget hole carved out during the 1990s will take more than two year's worth of significant increases to reverse. Thus, I am concerned that with the modest 4 percent increase proposed for this year and beyond, we are calling it quits before the job is done. We need to sustain significant defense budget increases for at least a few more years in order to begin to buy back a decade of systemic damage and disinvestment across the defense program. Only then can we afford to flatten out the defense investment curve over the long haul.

Second, notwithstanding marginal increases in the key modernization accounts, we are still lagging far behind what is necessary to support a modern, sustainable and sufficient combat force over the long term. The proposed \$72 billion for procurement falls far short of what has been broadly identified as necessary level of reinvestment to sustain the current force.

Further, the proposed budget recommends retiring or canceling programs in virtually every key combat category to carve out the resources to reinvest in "transformational" future systems. I have never been one to argue that we

— continued —

should not cancel or retire systems that have truly outlived their useful life or purpose, but, starting with the Air Force decision to retire a third of the B-1 bomber fleet, we continue to cut into the very foundation of our conventional combat power solely to free up funds for other needed initiatives. Simply put, Mr. Secretary, we should not be forced to incur such near term risk in terms of diminished combat capability in order to invest in the future solely because we have not properly resourced the defense budget.

Final point. The Department will soon approach the halfway point for the current fiscal year and still has received no additional resources for the billions of dollars in costs associated with the ongoing war on terrorism, homeland security support and generally increased pace of operations since September 11. This committee has over the years seen the lasting damage done when the Department is asked to pay for significant military operations “out of hide” with the promise of being made whole some time later in the year.

We know that once the services start canceling or deferring key maintenance and training activities to pay these bills, you never make up these lost opportunities and it invariably results in a downward spiral in overall readiness. I realize that I am preaching to the choir a bit here, but given the enormity of the bills the Department faces during this current year, it is important to stress the point once again that early action should be taken to replenish operational accounts as soon as possible and thus avoid the familiar negative effects of operating this way.

Mr. Secretary, I look forward to your testimony today and trust you will fully address these concerns in your presentation and through the continuing dialogue that you will sustain with the committee as this process moves forward.

#